FREE GUIDE



THE MINOR HOCKEY SOLUTION

THE HEAD COACHES GUIDE

Develop your goaltenders and look after them the right way — without knowing a thing about the technical side of the position.

Coach Wapps

INCREASE PERFORMANCE

Hey coaches — if you're taking the time to read this, I appreciate you. Let's be honest: your knowledge of the goaltending position is probably limited. And that's okay — it isn't your job to understand the technical side of it.

But the better your goaltenders are, the better your team is going to be. A good goalie hides a lot of a team's deficiencies, and no team wins without a goaltender who's playing well. Your job as a coach in minor hockey is to give kids a good experience and help them progress — and that goes for the goalie too.

There are so many things you can do, which I'm going to walk through, that help a goaltender's development and their mental health without you knowing anything about the technical side of the position.

Honestly, I'm tired of hearing goalie parents complain about minor hockey coaches, and that's exactly why we put this together. This won't just make you a better coach — it's the start of turning around goaltender development in minor hockey.

01 How to structure your practice

Right off the bat: I don't expect you to make every practice about the goaltenders. That's not what this is about. But there are a couple of things worth keeping in mind when you build your practice plans.

1. Give the goalies 15 minutes at the start. If you can give the goaltenders 15 minutes at the beginning of practice in one end, that's best-case scenario. Another coach can run them through the drills in the practice plans we've provided — that's plenty of time to work on their skills. I've worked alongside coaches for years and this has always worked great, and your players benefit too, getting 15 minutes of skill development to start. If you're splitting ice it's tougher — maybe there's a small area where they can get 10 minutes of skating.

2. Know which drills work for goalies. Not every drill is going to be good for the goalies, and that's okay — it would be ridiculous to say every drill can be goalie-friendly, and with proper coaching they'll learn to get better even in drills that aren't built for them. The one piece of advice I'll give you: limit drills where the goalie has no time to recover — facing 3–5 shots in 5–10 seconds. That wrecks their tracking for two reasons: they can't follow any rebounds, and they stop watching the puck because they're worried about the next shot. The more time they have to follow the rebound before the next shot, the better. If you only have one goaltender, this is especially important — otherwise they'll be gassed and just build bad habits.

> Splitting ice? **Draw a crease on the ice for them.** It's very tough for younger goalies to know where they are without one.

Keep those two things in mind and you're already improving your overall goaltender development.

02 Dealing with two goalies on a team

Whether your team has two goalies now or not, if you coach minor hockey you will at some point. A few things to keep in mind.

Who do I start against which team? In minor hockey it really shouldn't matter — your goal isn't to win, it's to make sure every kid leaves your team a better hockey player and a better person. But I understand there are “more important” games like playoffs and tournaments. One thing you should always do is stay ahead of the schedule and know who you're playing. If you've got a much stronger opponent two games in a row and one goalie is clearly better, it's okay to play the better goalie both games — but then the other one needs to play the next two in a row. In a tournament, if one goalie plays more, make sure the other plays more right after it's done. That way they both get time and nobody loses development.

At the end of the day, it's minor hockey. A lot of parents and coaches get caught up in winning and losing when the number one goal should be development. If they're really young, maybe split the game to keep them both involved — but I'd stop splitting games at the U13 level.

03 Telling your goalies who's starting

This one's a head-scratcher for me, based on some of the things I hear from goalies and parents. Whether every story has a little twist on it or not, I know some of these things happen daily — and the big one is when you tell a goalie they're starting.

If you've ever told your goaltenders to come to the rink like they're playing and then told them once they got there, please don't ever do that again. Goal is a different position — the mental stress and preparation are beyond what you can imagine. It's not like playing out. Every single mistake a goalie makes, everyone in the rink notices.

> **Let them know the day before.** Tell them the plan — and the why — days ahead. They'll respect and trust you ten times more when you're transparent.

And if you're going to play one goalie a few games in a row, tell the other goalie why, and that they'll get a few in a row after. That keeps them motivated and stops them getting down on themselves. It helps their confidence and, more importantly, their mental health and their love for the game. It doesn't mean the other goalie shows up unprepared — it just takes away the extra stress of not knowing.

04 Pulling a goalie

I'm not talking about pulling the goalie at the end of a game for an extra attacker — I mean putting the other goaltender in mid-game. Personally, I don't think goalies should be pulled unless they're a complete disgrace and every shot is going in. It's important for them to battle through the games where they're not feeling their best, because the reality is you don't feel your best every night as a goalie and you still have to find ways to win. If they never get to battle through those games, they'll never learn how. Again — this is about development.

But if the goalie is genuinely terrible and you're down 4–0 early, it's okay to pull them. “The team came out flat and needs a change of pace” isn't a good enough reason. In my opinion they need to be playing very poorly to get pulled in minor hockey. This isn't the NHL.

> **If you do pull a goalie, talk to them right away.** Being pulled is the worst feeling in the world as a goalie, no matter what led to it. Be positive and tell them it's all good — even if you're frustrated. They're kids. They're going to make mistakes, and that's part of being a kid. Be good to them afterward and your relationship with them only gets better.

05 Your words and interactions with goalies

The more confidence a goaltender has, the better they play — that's just the nature of the position. That said, I don't believe in sugar-coating; that doesn't prepare them for the next level or for life. But you need to be careful with what you say.

Never call a goalie out in front of their teammates during a game. They'll get insecure and scared to let a goal in, and that's the last thing you want. Keep it positive and reassure them not to worry about whatever happened — let's move forward. We want to build confidence, because without it a goaltender struggles. It's already a hard position mentally, with a lot of pressure. The last thing they need is a coach making them less confident than they already feel.

If a goalie is dogging it in practice, you can give them a push — but stay positive about it, or they'll get inside their own head and keep playing badly. The position is so mental that the wrong words make them start living in their own head, and once that happens they're going to be bad and not enjoy being there.

What to say after a game, regardless of the outcome. Whether your goalie steals the show or can't stop a beach ball, it's important to be positive. If they play great, tell them they played great. If they played badly, tell them it's okay and they'll be better next game — they already know if they played bad, and saying nothing doesn't help their confidence moving forward. That game is over, and you need them better next game.

06 Dealing with goalie parents

There's so much you can do as a head coach to ease a goalie parent's mind over a season. I've heard their concerns for years, and some simple communication at the start of the season goes a long, long way.

Having some open line of communication is always important. And like I said, your communication with their son or daughter eases a lot of their concerns too. All they want is for their goalie to be looked after — goalies have been an afterthought for far too long, and that's exactly why I created this.

> Follow these things and you're already making a difference for your goaltenders — **without knowing anything technical about the position.**

Cheers,

Coach Wapps